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ABSTRACT

A description is provided of the first-year activities of Clackamas County's Vocational Options Program (VOP), a program for high-risk youth focusing on affective skills, pre-employment training, specific job skill training, employment placement, and independent living. Part I looks at the employment training needs of young people in Clackamas County who had dropped out of traditional vocational education programs, and who displayed significant behavioral, attitudinal, and experiential barriers to employment. This section relates how the strategy for serving these students was developed by local school districts, Clackamas Community College, the Private Industry Council of Clackamas County, and county youth service agencies. Part II describes VOP, explaining the services provided, linkages with other agencies, the roles played by the agencies involved, staffing, the flow of services, unique relationships or services, and the budget. Finally, part III offers information on outcomes, including data on numbers served, placements, positive termination rates, etc.; a discussion of problems related to referral and staff assignment; a review of solutions; and an assessment of the achievement of original goals and noteworthy successes. (EJV)

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Final Report

VOCATIONAL OPTIONS PROGRAM

First Year Operations

School Year 1985 - 86

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INTRODUCTION

The Vocational Options Program is the outcome of a long-term effort to improve education and employment services for high-risk youth in Clackamas county. This effort has produced a dynamic partnership between schools, the SDA/PIC, the Community College, private industry and other youth-serving agencies. The programs that were developed as a result have become known as the Partnership for Youth Employment, a cooperative venture on the part of several agencies in an effort to assure that the most comprehensive services were available to youth in an age of dwindling financial resources. With the successful implementation of this highly coordinated,multi-agency approach to providing youth with employment training opportunities, the Partnership for Youth Employment has been able to avoid unnecessary duplication of services and serve greater numbers of youth at a lower cost than before.

The primary leadership for the program is prov ed by the Private Industry Council of Clackamas County, through its opera onal arm Employment, Training & Business Services and Clackamas Community Colle e through the Tri-City Alternative Program (TCAP). Most of the educational and youth service agencies in the county have participated in key planning sessions throughout the development of the partnership.

The partnership is now so supportive and integrated that its members communicate openly about un-met needs. For example, Oregon City school administrators shared the results of an internal survey of early school leavers; a study that resulted in the compilation of two hundred (200) student folders from the 1984 school year alone. Other administrators shared the frustration of recognizing programming needs, having some local resources, but not all the needed resources to respond to the needs.

I. IDENTIFIED NEEDS AND PROGRAM CONCEPT

In January 1985, local secondary school officials identified an alarming increase in the number of youth dropping out of traditional vocational education programs. A significant number of youth were also identified that were not likely to ever be enrolled in vocational education because they were so far behind in basic academic credits. Because of the personal characteristics of these youth, they are at a high-risk of becoming dropouts, offenders, and teen parents. These youth also display significant behavioral, attitudinal and experiential barriers to employment. They are also handicapped because they have no successful work history, lack the basic skills needed to compete effectively for jobs, lack the positive attitude employers require, and lack a support structure that values work and supports achievement.

Representatives from school districts, ESD, Community College, and the SDA began to outline the priorities for serving these youth: Job Training and Alternative Education. A major un-met need in Clackamas County was in the provision of specific job skill training for high-risk youth. These youth did not have access to this type of service because:

1. Traditional vocational educational programs are long-term in nature, their scheduling is inflexible and the requirements are set.

2. High-risk students are not scheduled into vocational training because they spend an inordinate amount of time trying to complete required classes.

3. Traditional vocational education is not always tied to the job market and students will not invest themselves in training that may not lead to a job.

4. The consortium of Clackamas County agencies providing pre-employment training had not provided specific job skill training.

After some discussion, a strategy for providing effective services began to emerge. The planning group felt it was important to operate the program in a central location so that all school districts could participate. The group was also interested in using proven alternative education methods in the delivery of vocational skills instruction. As the initial program concept began to emerge, the foundation for program development was laid:

1. The program would focus on "affective and generalizable" skills instruction. For example, VOP would not duplicate the mechanics shop at Oregon City High School but rather take youth that were both currently unemployable (facing considerable barriers to obtaining any entry-level job) and at considerable risk of dropping out of or never graduating from high school and provide them with the basic skills necessary to find and keep an entry-level job in the automobile service industry. Once the job was secured, the employer would teach the specific job skills needed to advance in the occupational area.

2. The program would provide general instruction in five service industry occupational areas; automotive, janitorial, clerical, food service and hospitality.

3. The program would operate on an "open entry, open exit" basis.

4. Students could attend VOP 1/2 day and their high school 1/2 day, VOP 1/2 day and TCAP 1/2 day, or VOP on a full day basis.

5. The program would become self-supporting by the third year of operation. In order to accomplish this, the school districts would "buy slots" for their student's participation.

As the planning process proceeded, the PIC, Employment Service, Juvenile Court, Juvenile Services Commission, and Children's Services Division were included. Private employers played a key role in curriculum development and provided instruction in a short-term training program that was operated as a prototype in the spring of 1985. Much of what was learned from this initial training program became the basis for further development of the Vocational Options Program.

II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

A. Services Provided

The Vocational Options Program has taken the partnership approach to operating education and employment training programs to a new level. Not only have ETBS and TCAP integrated their program offerings, but the two agencies operate the program jointly. One-half of the staff are employees of TCAP, the other half are employed by ETBS. TCAP staff provide educational instruction to participants while ETBS staff provide paid "hands-on" skill training, specific occupational skill training and placement into un-subsidized jobs. Program options are represented by the illustration below:

Vocational Options Program Model

CCC staff provide instruction in intensive Pre-Employment Training workshops that include the items listed in sections I., II., and V. in the wheel above. CCC staff also provide instruction in specific job skill training.

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ETBS staff develop paid hands-on training opportunities for students at training sites in both the public and private sectors. ETBS staff place students in these positions and provide follow-up monitoring and counseling to assure that youth progress adequately through their training. ETBS staff also develop private sector job openings using Try-Out Employment, On-the-Job Training, Tax Credits and direct placement for students that have completed training.

B. Linkages with Other Agencies

VOP staff work closely with high school personnel in the assessment of potential students and in on-going progress reports and information sharing. Virtually every youth-service agency in Clackamas County has been involved with VOP at one time or another in either the planning of the original program or by on-going referrals to the program. Students at VOP are often involved with the Juvenile Court, CSD, Mental Health or another youth service agency. VOP and other youth agency staff work closely together on common cases.

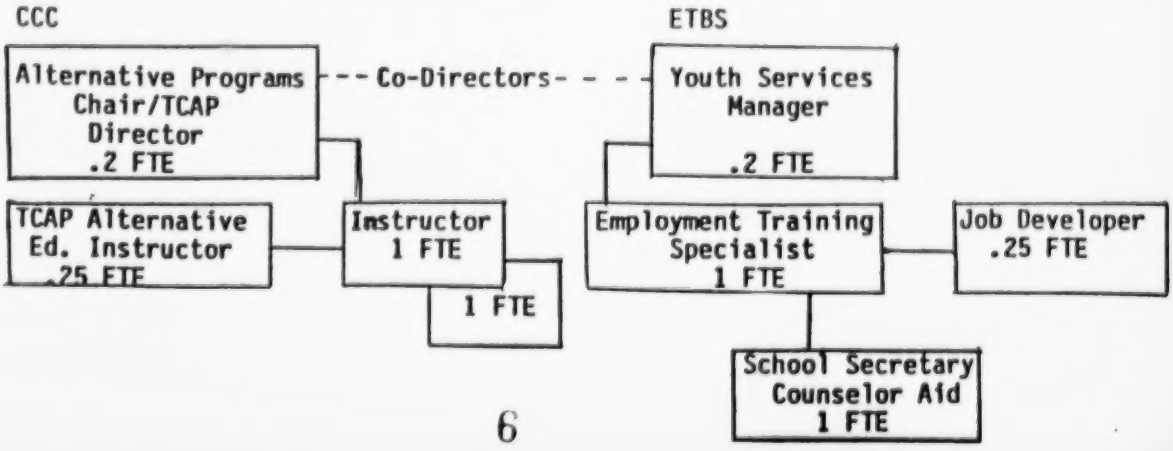
The ESD has played a key role in assisting with the allocation of Vocational Education disadvantaged and handicapped funds to VOP. This has allowed for the development of a $14,000 scholarship fund to be used primarily for youth returning to the community as a result of the down-sizing of MacLaren.

C. Role of Agencies Involved

As mentioned earlier, CCC and ETBS operate the program jointly. CCC is responsible for educational instruction and ETBS is responsible for job training and placement. The TCAP director and ETBS Youth Services Manager act as Co-directors of the Vocational Options Program. The college staff also provide much of the contract negotiation and liaison with the local high schools while ETBS provides fiscal management, administrative reporting requirements and liaison with the private business community.

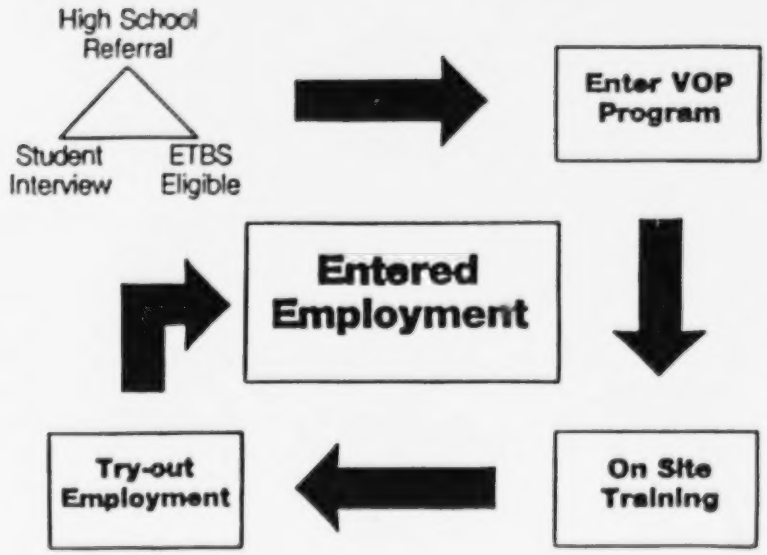
D. Staffing

VOCATIONAL OPTIONS PROGRAM
ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



E. Flow of Services

The flow of services for VOP participants is illustrated by the chart below.



F. Unique Relationships or Services

The Vocational Options Program has been able to attach itself to the Oregon City School District's Diversified Occupations Program. This arrangement has allowed VOP to become an approved vocational program under ODE guidelines. The arrangement is described in a simple written agreement between the Oregon City School District, Clackamas community College and Employment, Training & Business Services Division of Clackamas County. The program approval allows school districts to use Carl Perkins Act Disadvantaged and Handicapped (D & H) funds to purchase additional slots and for VOP to receive regional D & H funds through the ESD.

A contract has been developed with the Boys and Girls Aid Society Family Preservation Program to provide group counseling services aimed at increasing VOP participant's level of self-esteem. VOP staff are also receiving the training necessary to provide additional groups in the future.

6. Budget

Administration	13,865
Professional/Instructional Salary	55,058
Other Salary	11,772
Benefits	27,052
Instructional Supplies	2,500
Equipment & repair	3,720
Office Supplies/Building Expense	3,934
Contracted Services	7,278
Vehicle Operating Costs	1,122
Travel	3,290
Printing	625
Rent	5,500
Utilities	1,194
Participant Training Expense	5,000
Support Services	1,750
TOTAL	143,660

III. OUTCOMES

A. Numbers Served, Placements, Etc.

During its first year of operation, VOP served 51 students. Most of the students were referred by public high schools in Clackamas County.

A breakdown of completion information is listed below:

1.	Number of Youth having positive termination	50
2.	Positive Termination Rate	98%
3.	Cost per Positive Termination	1849
4.	Number Youth Entering Employment	27
5.	Number Youth Retaining Employment 30 days or longer	20
6.	Entered Employment Rate (over 30 days)	39%
7.	Out of School Participants	38
	# Obtaining GED	18
8.	In-School Participants	13
	# Returned to school (86-87)	8
	# Graduated	2

B. Needs Un-met By Program

1. Problems

a. Referral

During the first year of operation, a great deal of time was spent working with school personnel on the referral process. Because VOP was a brand new program operating under a very unique concept, it naturally took some time before the local high school staff responsible for making referrals

completely understood the benefits of program participation for their students. Then it was necessary to make sure that other school staff were aware of and understood the program so that they could help identify potential referrals.

Referral to VOP was very slow at first and while it increased steadily throughout the school year, the planned number of participants to be served was never reached. In addition, schools tended to refer students with the lowest skill level and most were youth with severe learning disabilities. Some students were experiencing severe psychological and emotional disturbances that required long-term treatment services that the program did not have to offer. All students had very low self-esteem.

VOP staff spent long hours working with schools to facilitate timely, appropriate referrals. It was particularly critical that VOP be seen as a viable resource for both special needs students and for economically or otherwise disadvantaged students. Based on past experiences, staff knew that if schools were to become set on VOP as an option for special needs students only, it would be very difficult to achieve adequate referral of economically disadvantaged students in future years.

b. Staff Assignments

VOP staff worked extremely well together and developed a very strong team approach. Because VOP was a very innovative, experimental approach to vocational training, staff went into the first year of operation expecting unforseen problems to crop up and with the knowledge that a fair amount of trial and error would take place as methods of service delivery were developed. As a result, staff roles tended to become fuzzy and merge at times. Often times two or three staff were performing the same function in an effort to help each other out. By the end of the first year of operation, enough experience had been gained to point to the need for some restructuring of program components and staff assignments.

2. Solutions

By the end of the first year, the solutions to the referral problem were well in hand. School personnel had a better understanding of appropriate referrals and were prepared to refer more students at the beginning of the following school year. In addition, more extensive screening methods were developed to assure that students accepted into the program were likely to succeed.

Those students experiencing problems beyond the scope of VOP are referred to other services more suited to meet their particular needs. The schools are currently making timely, appropriate referrals and VOP is operating more smoothly as a result.

At the end of the school year, staff spent several days reviewing first-year operations and planning the second year program. A need was identified to provide a training component that would provide students the opportunity to develop and practice work skills prior to entering or in combination with paid training activities. As a result, a crew concept was developed and put in place. Supervised crews of 4-5 students perform work for various organizations in the community and at the same time are able to practice specific work skills. The instructor that plans and supervises crew activities is able to design activities that address each student's individual training needs. The crews also perform valuable services in the community and at this time, work is being performed at Clackamas Community College, Pizza Hut, Red, White and Blue Thrift Store and Olson Brothers Shell.

The businesses that have participated naturally have a lot of contact with the students and in the first six weeks of the school year have hired one student from the crew and provided a training opportunity for another which will likely result in a hire as well.

With the implementation of the crew concept, staff assignments sort of naturally shook out in a way that clarified each member's role and separated the various training and instructional functions. VOP is currently operating both morning and afternoon sessions filled with students that are progressing well through training. Overall operation of the program is going quite smoothly and services are being provided in an efficient, effective manner and 2 students have completed the program and entered employment during the first six weeks of the school year.

C. Achievement of Original Goals/Objectives and Noteworthy Successes

The Vocational Options Program has successfully demonstrated the feasibility of using alternative education methods to provide generalized vocational instruction. The program has also proven the validity of providing this type of instruction to youth at risk of dropping out of high school as well as to those who have already dropped out. By maintaining an "open entry, open exit" policy and preserving program flexibility, VOP is able to respond quickly and effectively to individual participant needs.

The program has set a precedent by requiring local high schools to contract for services at a cost above the basic school support figure. The program received nearly $60,000 for contracted services during the 1985-86 school year and it is projected that $75-85,000 in local school district funds will come in during the 1986-87 school year. The balance of on-going program support is currently maintained by CCC and ETBS and the program is well on its way to self-sufficiency.

Becoming accredited initially presented a difficult challenge at VOP as there was no approved cluster program in existence in the county that the program could logically fall under. The problem was solved by attaching the program to Oregon City High School's Diversified Occupations Program. This allowed VOP to become an approved vocational program eligible for funds under the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act. The Oregon City School district also became a new partner in the process.

The program fell short of its planned enrollment by nine students during the first year of operation. The placement rate for students retaining employment thirty days or longer was 39%, two points below the JTPA performance standard. Of all students placed in jobs, the placement rate was 53%. Considering the difficulties encountered in getting an adequate number of appropriate referrals and the fact that this was the first year operation of a truly innovative program, we view the outcome of the first year of operation as a great success.

The Vocational Options Program is viewed as a viable option for youth at risk of dropping out of school. Referring agencies are pleased with the results as is evidenced by the marked increase in student referrals at the beginning of the second year of operation. The program is a replicable model for what can be done with partnerships and can be used as a basis for developing similar programs in other areas.

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